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ABSTRACT

In determining the future development of career education in community colleges, the variables of community college size and geographic location, emphasis on vocational versus liberal arts education, and age levels of students must be considered. The young student needs career exploration, while the adult is broadening skills or lifestyle. Meeting both needs requires community collaboration, faculty attitudinal changes, and cooperation with elementary and secondary school vocational programs. Basic elements of career education include (1) a careful consideration of educational goals; (2) helping students acquire change adaptation skills, including an understanding of the changing meaning of "work"; (3) expansion of career exploration experiences to include academic credit and participation by community personnel and faculty; and (4) work experience opportunities for all students, regardless of academic choices. Finally, all community college efforts should be developed within the concept of career education as a lifelong process which links all stages of education and life. (RT)

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CAREER EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: AN EVOLVING CONCEPT

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Introduction

The philosophical foundations of the community college movement and the career education concept have much in common. (Hoyt, 1973). As a result, it would be difficult to identify any community college where no "bits and pieces" of career education exist. Unfortunately, this leads to a "we're already doing it" kind of reaction when the topic of career education is raised with many community college experts. To offset this, I would like to begin with a bold assertion that, so far as I know, comprehensive, bonafide career education efforts are extremely rare in community college settings today. These remarks will hopefully hold greatest meaning for those who disagree violently with that assertion.

It would be both foolish and futile to construct and defend an idealistic model for career education in the community college at the present time. Too many variables including: (a) the great diversity of kinds of students served in one community college as opposed to another; (b) the large number of unknown factors that will determine the future of the community college movement in our nation; and (c) the still evolving nature of the career education concept. On the other hand, to use such variables as an excuse for failing to devote serious thought to the problem is to engage in professionally irresponsible behavior.

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Thus, these remarks are aimed at identification of several major problems that appear to be common across most community college settings. For each, I will attempt to outline my own current position. My hope is that, by doing so, all of us will be better equipped to help each other develop better and more defensible positions. I, for one, readily acknowledge my own personal need for such help.

Many of the thoughts to be expressed here represent things I have learned from participants in two of the OCE "mini-conferences" held during the 1976-77 academic year. One involved 12 community college career education "experts" identified through a nationwide nomination procedure. The second involved four additional community college career education experts identified by AACJC. While the help of these "mini-conference" participants is gratefully acknowledged, I hasten to add that none should be held accountable for these remarks.

I want to begin with a brief discussion of several variables that combine to prevent us from formulating a single community college career education model at the present time. This will necessarily be accompanied by some predictions regarding the future nature of the community college student body. Following this, I would like to comment briefly on the significance of the word "community" for career education in the community college. Finally, I will offer some thoughts on what I currently regard as basic elements in a comprehensive community college career education effort.

Variables and Predictions

Community colleges, because each aims to serve a different community, are

necessarily more distinguished by their diversity than by their similarities. Several of these hold direct implications for those concerned with developing a model for community college career education efforts. The three most significant sources of variation to consider here are: (a) size and geographic location; (b) age levels of students served; and (c) the relative emphasis placed on occupational education as opposed to the liberal arts. To attempt to use a single model for the community college in Hutchinson, Kansas and in Dade County, Florida would be doomed to failure both because of differences of size and in the rural, as opposed to the urban, setting. Even within the large urban setting, it seems fruitless to attempt to impose the same model on LaGuardia Community College in New York City--where 80% of students are recent high school graduates--and Wayne County Community College in Detroit--where only 25% are recent high school graduates. The strong liberal arts emphasis found in the community college in Ocean County, New Jersey, as opposed to the strong occupational education emphasis present in Kirkwood Community College at Cedar Rapids, Iowa pose very different implementation problems.

Of these three variables, the most significant, in terms of implications for career education efforts in community colleges are concerned, is the age distribution of students who choose to enroll. While, of course, numerous exceptions can be found, it seems safe to venture a few generalizations regarding needs of younger students, as opposed to older adults, for career education in the community college.

The young high school graduate seeking admission to the community college is often unsure regarding career goals. At the same time, strong societal

pressures are brought to bear urging him/her to make career decisions. Some students succumb by immediately enrolling in a specific occupational education program. Others resist by enrolling in only the liberal arts offerings which, they contend, will be helpful to them no matter what kind of occupation they eventually enter. The need to traverse the "rites of passage" from youth to adulthood lead a great majority of these students to seek "college credit" for almost any kind of educational experience they undergo at the community college. Increasingly, this is including requests that they receive "academic credit" for experiences aimed at such goals as career awareness, exploration, planning, and decision-making--including those activities having some work experience component.

The older adult, on the other hand, is very often an individual who enrolls in the community college for purposes of broadening his/her total lifestyle, not for purposes of acquiring entry-level occupational skills. Somehow, it seems to have become respectable to value the broader array of educational goals if one is firmly established in an occupational role. Partly, perhaps, because they <u>are</u> adults, older students seem less worried about whether or not a particular learning experience carries "academic credit" and more worried about whether or not it meets their felt educational needs. I have a distinct feeling that adult students in the community college who enroll for specific purposes of making mid-career occupational changes are in the minority--even among those called "adult students." That is, among the total population of adults who could benefit from community college attendance, I believe the problems of those faced with traumatic decisions

regarding mid-career specific occupational change have been overemphasized. Important as these problems and these persons are, they do not seem to me to be either the most important or the most numerous.

As an "outsider" to the community college movement, I feel free to make some predictions regarding the future nature of community college students without being inhibited by specific knowledge regarding the community college movement. These "outsider" predictions may find their primary utility in serving as "attack points" for rebuttals by community college experts. Even that would, it seems to me, be useful.

First, I predict that the average age of community college students will increase substantially in the next ten years. In addition to the usual actuarial reasons for making this prediction, there are two other factors operating. One is the current rapid growth of vocational/technical education institutions who, increasingly, serve both secondary and postsecondary students. I have a feeling that they can be expected to draw significant numbers of both recent high school graduates and adults who seek specific occupational skills required for immediate job entry. The second is what I regard as an inevitable move, on the part of our system of State colleges and universities, to seek to attract liberal arts students during the Freshman and Sophomore years. They almost have to move in this direction in terms of their own survival needs. I have a distinct feeling that the current trend toward placing "caps" on community college enrolments may well be related to this need. Both of these will, it seems to me, tend to cut into what would otherwise be a continuing increase in community college enrolments.

Second, and related to the first, I predict that, increasingly, community colleges will find the career education needs of their older adult students centering arund (a) the need for upgrading in occupational skills related to their current occupations; and/or (b) the need to acquire skills and knowledge useful in helping them make more productive use of leisure time--to help them lead fuller, more satisfying lives. To the extent that this prediction is accurate, it may well be that the goal of "education as preparation for work" will, for many adult students, be translated primarily in terms of unpaid work carried out as productive use of leisure time--not as preparation for the world of paid employment. When applied to the world of paid employment, that goal, it seems to me will, for increasing numbers of adults, be translated in terms of acquiring skills required for adapting to changes within their chosen occupational field rather than in seeking a new and completely different set of occupational skills.

To the extent to which either of these two predictions is accurate, career education in the community college will certainly be much different in nature than those efforts now serving as models at the K-12 level.

The "Community" in Community College Career Education Efforts

The concept of "collaboration" was a key ingredient in career education when the movement was launched in 1971. That concept was picked up by Willard Wirtz and his associates when they produced The Boundless Resource several years later. It is currently being further championed through creation of a number of demonstration "community education/work councils" funded largely with Department of Labor funds. A recent DOL grant to AACJC has resulted in an important effort to demonstrate a leadership role

for the community college in the community education/work collaborative effort. Because the total effort is so directly tied into career education, OE's Office of Career Education is investing a substantial amount of funds into the total National Manpower Institute project. Whether or not some of these OCE funds is used in those five communities where community colleges are taking leadership roles has yet to be determined. In any event, there are four aspects of this total concept that deserve discussion here.

First, and most important, I would hope that no community college engages in such a total community effort without starting from an internal frame of reference. The effort cannot hope to succeed unless the need for internal change among community college staff members--and especially among the teaching faculty--is recognized and acted upon. To whatever extent such an effort does not include concentrated attempts to create changes in the attitudes--and thus the actions--of the teaching faculty, it will have missed the basic point of career education as a refocusing of American education. If this happens, the best that can be hoped for will be creation of a series of new specialists, new courses, and new services within the community college--and that is the "add-on" approach, not true career education. At worst, unless careful thinking is devoted to the topic, a so-called "community education/work council" might try to operate as though the community college itself will remain "as is"--and that would surely be disastrous. I see no good way the full potential of the community college for playing a leadership role in establishing and coordinating the work of a "community education/work council" can be

realized unless and until the community college commits itself to the kinds of internal changes called for by the career education concept.

Second, for community colleges to play a leadership role here, the past and present contributions of the K-12 system of public education must be recognized and used, not ignored nor replaced. Of the approximately 9,300 K-12 public school districts that have, to date, initiated some kind of career education effort, there may be as many as 1,000-2,000 who have already established some kind of "community career education action council." Such entities, where they exist, have typically already begun some systematic efforts to identify, catalogue, and utilize resources in the business/labor/industry/professional community for career education. If a community college operates in a community where the K-12 system has initiated this kind of action, it seems to me both appropriate and desirable to try to join forces--not compete with--such an effort. Any community college can make substantial contributions to helping such K-12 school systems improve their initial data bank and operational relationships with the broader community. Whether or not the K-12 school system has initiated such an effort, it seems especially obvious to me that any such efforts on the part of any community college must be planned in ways that include, rather than exclude, the K-12 public school system.

Third, any community college considering an expansion of collaborative relationships with the broader community in the arena of education/work efforts must, it seems to me, recognize the need to include the many important community segments who, for years, have wrestled with these problems on their own. I am referring here to such efforts as those of

local service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.), local chapters of Scouting, USA, Girl Scouts of the USA, Junior Achievement, Chamber of Commerce, The National Alliance of Businessmen, Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Women's American ORT, local Council of Churches, local AFL/CIO affiliates, local NOW chapters, the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary. Most of these efforts have concentrated on younger students and have not considered devoting similar amounts of energy to the community college setting. For some, it would be admittedly inappropriate to do so. That is not the point. Rather, the point is that each represents an existing community resource both interested in and holding high potential for making positive contributions to the total career education effort. Many of their efforts could be, and should be, put in a career development perspective that recognizes the need for extending services and concerns to at least the younger students in the community college. It is a set of resources that should be fully utilized.

Finally, any such effort must recognize the broader community as a learning laboratory for community college students--just as the community college has viewed itself as a learning opportunity for all segments of the community. The "information rich/experience poor" charges that have been leveled against American education are not entirely without validity. The concept of experiential learning has yet to be converted from a series of course opportunities for a minority of students to an educational methodology available to all. The hard questions of who will determine, supervise,

grade, and "credit" experiential learning in the broader community are ones that will, hopefully, be answered with the help of "community education/work councils." The necessity for recognizing this as a major direction for change cannot be ignored in any such effort.

Basic Elements of Career Education in Community College Settings

For all of the reasons discussed earlier--plus more--it seems likely to me that career education efforts in community colleges may well vary considerably from those at the K-12 levels. The earlier K-12 experience, on the other hand, can and should be utilized in thinking about dangers to be avoided in initiating career education in community colleges. As a final part of this presentation, then, I would like to outline what, at this point in time, I consider to be basic elements of career education in a community college setting. I do so with the obvious note of caution that these elements will have to be applied in different fashions--depending on the characteristics of the community college, its students, and the community in which it operates.

First, and most important, a community college career education effort must, it seems to me, start with a full and careful consideration of community college educational goals. The goal of "education as preparation for work" must be considered as one among several basic goals of the community college. It should not be allowed to take precedence over other basic goals. Rather, it should be recognized as one among several to which the community college is committed.

Second, with respect to the goal of "education as preparation for work," career education asks for an expansion in meaning of that goal beyond the

conventional interpretation as "specific vocational skill training required for entry into the occupational society." In addition to this interpretation, this goal must take on two other important meanings. One concerns itself with helping students acquire adaptability skills (including work habits, work values, decision-making skills, etc.) required for changing with change in the occupational society. The second concerns itself with expanding the meaning of this goal so as to include unpaid work as well as paid employment--including both productive use of leisure time and the changing meaning of "work" in today's home/family structure. The community college engaged in true career education will accept and find ways of implementing this expanded meaning of the goal of "education as preparation for work."

Third, the community college's career education efforts will expand greatly the means utilized for helping students in the career awareness, exploration, planning, and decision-making process. In too many community colleges, these functions are today seen as the prime responsibility of student personnel workers. This, I feel, must change in several ways. One way can easily be seen if we consider current priorities for use of occupational education facilities. Too often, these are reserved--either by law, policy, custom, or tradition--primarily for use by those preparing for specific job entry in a particular area of occupational education. Career education calls for such facilities to be made equally available to the liberal arts student who wants to acquire only enough skill in a particular area so that skill can be used in productive use of leisure time. They should also be made available to the occupationally undecided student who wants some "hands on"

exposure to several areas of occupational education before making firm career decisions. In my "ideal" career education program, students will receive academic credit for such experiences.

A second expansion will be seen in greatly increased faculty participation in the career guidance process. I see no way of fully implementing career education unless the teaching faculty are regarded as key participants. Each can and should know the career implications of his/her specialty--in terms of both paid and unpaid work--and be prepared to discuss them with students. Obviously, this will require both (a) inservice staff development for the teaching faculty and (b) specific assigned time for faculty members to participate in these kinds of interactions with students.

A third area of expansion in this area will be involvement of persons from the business/labor/industry/professional community in the career guidance process. Whether involved in small group seminars, as resource persons in classrooms, or as members of a counseling team in the student personnel offices, such persons can and should be utilized in the career guidance process.

Fourth, a community college career education effort should, it seems to me, involve some form of work experience opportunity for all students. I am, of course, here thinking primarily about the younger students who come to the community college directly from high school. Those enrolled in such liberal arts programs as pre-law, pre-medicine, pre-engineering, etc. are as deserving of work experience opportunities as are those enrolled in pure occupational education programs. Whether that work experience is paid or unpaid will depend on the total set of reasons why it is undertaken--

i.e., to the extent productivity for an employer is involved, then pay should also be involved but, to the extent the primary goal is career exploration, unpaid work experience may be justified. This is a good example of an area where implementation should be done only with the full participation of organized labor in basic policy determinations.

Fifth, a community college career education effort should, it seems to me, be built and operated within the framework of career development as a lifelong process. If this is done, then that effort will surely be intimately tied to career education efforts at the K-12 level. It will also be tied to adult/recurrent/continuing education efforts and with career education efforts at the four-year college/university level. A community college that has not considered and established such linkages cannot, in my opinion, be considered to be operating a comprehensive career education effort.

As part of this linkage effort with other segments of education, it seems particularly crucial that the generic problem of stereotyping, as a deterrent to full freedom of occupational choice, be considered and acted upon. This includes problems of race and sex stereotyping as well as stereotyping with respect to handicapped persons and to older Americans. For example, it is difficult to believe that a Title IX Coordinator in a community college would have no interest or involvement in efforts of local elementary schools to reduce sex stereotyping in textbooks and in classroom practices--for it is at these early ages where neglect is most damaging and help is most rewarding.

Finally, it seems to me that, if a community college is engaged in a comprehensive career education effort, the liberal arts faculty will be deeply involved in providing students with knowledge and experience required for actions the student will take to humanize his/her total lifestyle. There is much talk today about dehumanizing conditions in the world of paid employment--and, to be sure, such conditions do exist. At the same time, the individual does have some control over the extent to which such conditions will be personally dehumanizing. If the liberal arts are the "liberating" arts, then they should make a conscious attempt to help individuals find a personal meaning and meaningfulness in life that will allow them to cope successfully with many of the dehumanizing conditions they are likely to find in the world of paid employment. I would consider such attempts an integral part of the total career education effort.

Concluding Remarks

In my opinion, career education is much needed on the campus of every community college. Perhaps you can see, from these remarks, why I feel there is still much to be done before this becomes a reality. I very much hope that some will be inclined to devote their energies into making career education--comprehensive career education--a reality on the community college campus.

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